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Title Page

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SOME ASPECTS OF NĀYAR LIFE.

By K. M. Panikkar.

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Note.—I have not attempted here to write anything like a detailed study of the Social Life and Customs of the Nāyars. My purpose in this Essay has been mainly to put together a few facts which do not seem to have been sufficiently dealt with by previous writers. It is therefore offered rather as supplementary notes than as an original contribution.

I have everywhere depended upon my own observations as to matters of detail. Wherever I have ventured either to suggest new interpretations or to question old theories my authorities generally are eighteenth-century Malayalam poets, who describe the Nāyar Society of the time with great accuracy and detail. My debt to various anthropological classics is evident, and I have acknowledged it everywhere in footnotes.

I.—Introductory.

The Nāyar country extends traditionally from Gokarnam to Cape Camorin along the littoral of the Arabian Sea. The geographical position of the country is very important. The Western Ghats, which extend from near Bombay down to Cape Camorin, attain near the Malabar country the character of a mountain range studded

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with high and noble peaks. These shut the Nāyar country entirely out of the rest of India and have helped to a very great extent to preserve the peculiar customs of marriage and relationships of Malabar. The monsoon which these Ghats receive makes Malabar the most picturesque part of India, an ever green country with lofty trees, luxuriant vegetation, noble rivers and magnificent lakes. There is nowhere a place which so much approximates to the description of

> "Larger constellations burning, mellow moons and happy skies,
> Breadths of tropic shade and cluster knots of paradise;
> Droops the heavy blossomed bower, hangs the heavy fruited tree,
> Summer isles of Eden lying in the purple sphere of sea."

The extreme fertility of the valley and the rich tropical luxuriance of the forest have made life extremely easy, which even the importation of machines, mills, and factories has not been able entirely to change. Malabar is to a great extent, therefore, a land of idleness, and I may say of intellectual culture, for nowhere is learning, art, and poetry so much esteemed as among the Nampudiris and Nāyars of Malabar.

There are various reasons to believe that the Nāyars were very early comers in this place.[1] That they were not the aboriginal inhabitants of the place is evident from the fact that all over Malabar, from Mangalore to Cape Camorin, Nāyar families possess agricultural serfs who are distinctly of the negroid type. The Nāyars are a Dravidian race whose culture has only been superficially influenced by the Aryan immigration; of this more later.

The other communities of Malabar among whom the Nāyars live, are the Nampudiris, the Tiyas and the Pulayas. The Nampudiris are Brahmin landlords whose intercourse with and influence on the Nāyars we shall have to consider in detail later. A few families of Kshatriyas form the petty royalty of Malabar. The Tiyas are toddy drawers, people who are free men in theory but still show traces of serfdom in their relation with Nāyars, living as their tenants and doing their work for them. And the Pulayas, who till lately were slaves on whom was built up the agricultural life of the country. There are innumerable minor tribes, but they are small communities differentiated on the basis of their profession, like the Kanyans (astrologers), Asaris (carpenters), etc.

In this order Nāyars come next to the Brahmins and Kshatriyas and have precedence over all other castes. They are considered generally as a Dravidian variety of the Aryan Kshatriyas, which is, however, absolutely spurious in theory and is true only in so far as their *de facto* position is concerned. Any way, they form the feudal aristocracy of Malabar. Burke on a famous occasion classed them with

[1] See note at the end of the essay, on "The Origin of the Word Nāyars," Appendix. Note I.

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the Mamalukes of Egypt.[1] Camoens, the Milton of Portugal, described them in these lines :—

> "By the proud Nāyars noble rank is claimed;
> The toils of culture and of art they scorn,
> The shining falchion brandished in the right,
> Their left arm wields the target in the fight."

As a matter of fact, the Nāyars as a military aristocracy have been famous ever since Marco Polo travelled in Asia.

"In this region of Malabar," says Gaspar Correa, writing on the three voyages of da Gama,[2] "the race of Gentlemen is called Nairs who are people of war. They are people who are very refined in blood and customs and separated from all other people. So much do they value themselves that no one of them ever turned a Moor."

"Of these Malabars there are two manner of people (the one is) Noblemen called Nāyars which are soldiers and do only weare and handle arms and the other is the common people called Polayas. The Nayros must [in all places] where they go or stand weare such arms as are appointed for them and alwaies be ready at the King's commandement. . . . . .

"As these Nayros go in the streets they cry po! po! which is to say take heed I come, stand out of the way."[3]

Historical circumstances have also had their share in the abundance of material which foreigners have left with regard to the Nāyars. Malabar was the seat of Arabic trade, and the Portuguese first landed at Calicut. During the hundred and fifty years of Portuguese power in India they had dealings mostly with the Zamorin of Calicut, the Rajah of Cochin, and the Deva Narayana, Rajah of Prakaud. That was the land from which spices came, and the Portuguese, therefore, were interested in the petty politics of these principalities. The Dutch, who followed then, also had their main interest on the mainland of India centred on Cochin, and in the first beginnings of English commerce, also, Malabar had a share. Apart from these a number of observant travellers has visited the seaboard of Malabar.

But though material of a kind is, therefore, abundant, it is found on closer examination to be unscientific and unreliable. The Nāyar Society of the eighteenth century, or an age previous to that, cannot be reconstructed from the observations of either Duarte Barbosa or Vinschar. An accurate and scientific description of the state of society prevalent before European contact is possible only after a thorough and searching study of Nāyar literature. Camoens' description of the Nāyars as scorning the toils of culture is not true. Malayalam has an extensive

[1] Had they (the French aristocracy) been like the Mamalukes of Egypt or Nāyars of the coast of Malabar. (*French Revolution*, p. 148, World's Classics.)

[2] *Voyages of Vasco da Gama*, Hakluyt Soc., vol. i, p. 185.

[3] *Voyage of Linschoten to the East Indies*, translation of 1598. Edited by Hakluyt Soc., vol. i, p. 278 *et seq.*

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Malayalam has an extensive literature, and it has been developed almost entirely by the Nampūdiris and the Nāyars. The following essay is based on an examination of eighteenth-century literature. As far as it treats of present customs and ceremonies it is based on the personal experience and observations of the writer.

II.—THE VILLAGE ORGANIZATION OF THE NĀYARS.

A clear understanding of the life and customs of the Nāyars is impossible without an adequate idea of the strength of their village organization. In this connection it is necessary to make an important distinction at the very start. The village organization in Malabar is utterly unlike the village communities in British India, and therefore should not be confused with them.[1] Malabar has no *village community*: it has only a village *organization*. To make the distinction clearer: in British India, in general, there are communities grouped together in a village, generally owning land in common and dealing with other villages as units. But in Malabar individual property, in the ordinary legal sense, is universal, and the village organization comes in only for specific purposes such as the management of the temple affairs and, in olden days, for military training and mobilization.

Another distinction is that the Malabar village organizations include only Nāyar families, though in the same village there may be Christians, Ezhuvs, and Jews. For purposes of communal life other castes are outside the village organization. All these castes, except the Parayas, the Pulayas, and all those who were, till the abolition of slavery, in bondage to their masters, live side by side. Another point to remember in this connection is that Malabar villages are not like British Indian villages, built according to a plan. Each house in a Malabar village stands apart in a separate compound and in each compound generally there is a house. It might happen that the compound nearest a Nāyar's house is occupied by a Christian. But as far as the village organization is concerned the non-Nāyars do not exist.

Malabar in olden days was divided into ten or twelve states, each of which was ruled by a Rajah. These states were divided into *Nads* (countries); each of these *Nads* consisted of certain *Dēsams*; and the *Dēsams* were subdivided into *Amsas*. Later administrative division has abolished the first two to a great extent, though they survive in popular speech and in poetic language. But the *Amsas*, or villages, are wholly intact even now; indeed they form the unit of administration. Before the British conquest and the division of Nāyar country into three parts, British Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore, Nāyar society was built up on a feudal basis. Each of the *Nads* was under the control of a local magnate called *Nadu Vazhi* (the ruler of the *Nad*). He had criminal and civil jurisdiction and the right to claim

[1] Cf. Matthai, *Village Government in British India*. T. Fisher Unwin, 1915.

He had criminal and civil jurisdiction and the right to claim military service from the Nāyars under him. The *Nadu Vazhis* kept a local force varying between five hundred and one thousand men, which they were obliged to put into the field at the command of their Rajah. The *Nadu Vazhis* were kept under control by the Rajah when he was able to do so. But in any case they were bound to fight for him. Below these *Nadu Vazhis* were *Desa Vazhis* (lords of the Manor). They had the right of keeping a *Kalari* or a military academy. In each village there was one *Desa Vazhi* (sometimes more), who was called master (*Asān*) by the Nāyars. He was their military preceptor in peace time and their leader in war time.

The principal business of the *Desa Vazhi* was to train the young men of *Desa* in his *Kalari*. All Nāyar boys after twelve were supposed to attend the *Kalari* and learn boxing, fencing, sword play, military formation, and the ordinary rules of warfare. For such training the *Desa Vazhi* was not paid. After eighteen the boys were not supposed to attend the *Kalari*, but were required to be ready to start for war at a day's notice.

The *Kalaris* are still in existence. Even now the Nāyar young men who do not go to English schools get some sort of a training with imitation swords and shields, because swords are prohibited by the Arms Act. In certain families one male member has to be proficient in this art so as to be able to teach the others. The *Kalaris*, though now visited by people only for the extreme beauty of their architecture, are still used by the Nāyars of the *Desas* as places of worship.

On the festival days in the village temple the Nāyars, who have been thus trained, even now hold a review in martial array (*vēla*). In Trivandrum, which is the capital of the Maharajah of Travancore, this feature is very prominent. In other places there are still *Patayanis* (*Pata*=war, *ani*=to get ready). All the Nāyars of the surrounding districts assemble, and the ceremonies which in former days stood for military manœuvres are held with great enthusiasm.

The centre of all the martial and, consequently, of the social life of the Nāyars is, therefore, the *Desa*. In each village there is a temple owned by the community. The temple is generally self-supporting, and occasionally very rich. The temple authorities are appointed by the village. The power is generally vested in the *Pramanis*, or the chief men. In each village there are certain families who have the right of being consulted in all matters connected with it. The head of these *Pramanis* is the Lord of the Manor.

In describing the organization of the village, it is better to take one practical example which is typical. Kavalam is such a village. I shall, therefore, confine myself to the description of the organization of that village.

The village is supposed to consist of one hundred and fifty houses. This is the traditional number, but at least fifty of these have emigrated. But though they live in other parts of the country they are still considered to belong to this organization. In all the ceremonies that require the sanction of the village the emigrant,

[i.e., The Nadu Vazhi -- Analyst]

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unless he has been admitted by certain formalities to the village to which he has emigrated, is considered to belong to his original home.

The village is divided into two *Karas* (or *Amsams*), the northern *Kara* and the southern *Kara*. The division is arbitrary and has no significance. A man from Kavalam belonging to the North or South *Kara* is treated in another village as belonging to the same place.

The *Bhagavati* (goddess) Temple in the village was, before the government took possession of it, owned by *two Karas jointly*.

In each of the *Karas* there are five *Āsāns* or *Pramanis*. They keep *Kalaris* and are honoured and respected by all the Nāyars in the district. No common Nāyar is allowed to sit in their presence, to enter their kitchen, or to call their women without the title of *Kunjamma* (or Ladyship).

The seventy-five families which the *Kara* contains are divided between the five *Āsāns*. Each *Āsān*, therefore, has a general authority over all the families, and special rights over the fifteen families immediately under his control.

In all matters of ceremony the *Āsāns* have to be informed beforehand. Without their presence, no public ceremony of any family is supposed to be valid. All the public functions of the village are done by them. The ceremonies of the temple, for example, are under their control. They are the people who summon the *Karakkars*, or the villagers, to assemble and settle matters of importance. The villagers settle in such assemblies, things relating to the community, such as public festivals, the expenditure of *Karayogam* (common to the village) funds and the behaviour of people who have acted against the customs of the village. If a marriage ceremony had not been properly conducted, it comes before them. If an *Āsān* had not been properly invited, that matter also comes up for consideration. Instances of punishments inflicted by the village on individuals and families were not uncommon till lately. I remember a particular case in which the villagers as a body led by their *Āsān* walked out of the marriage (*Talikettu*) *pandal* because the order of precedence was not kept up. The family of a squire had, during these hard days, become poor, and a rich squire who, in order of precedence, came below him was given a seat of honour. The result was that the whole community walked out as a protest, and the *Kalyanam* had to be held over again to the satisfaction of the poor *Āsān* and his loyal friends.

How strong this organisation is will be seen from the following incident. A gentleman, when coming from Madras, had a Christian friend with him, and his servant who waited for him at Alleppey was eating his food when both of them entered the boat. It is a very rigid custom that no food can be taken in the company, or even in the proximity of any lower caste, and Christians are considered to be such. The result of it was that when they got home the news got abroad that the Nāyar servant had eaten with a Christian in the boat, and the whole village

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264 626 564 was in a state of terrible fury. It was only with great trouble that they were persuaded not to excommunicate the poor man.

621 178 The Nāyar life and customs can be rightly understood only in the light of their village organisation. The enormous influence the opinion of the village has in all matters connected with their social, as well as their family, life is the main reason of the persistence of the Nāyars as a vigorous and healthy community in spite of strong economic pressure, merciless competition and fast changing conditions. It is also due to this system of organised life that the customs of sexual relationship and marriage, which look so loose and immoral on paper, are found actually to be decent and tolerable. The Nāyar community is not more immoral than any other community in the world. The restraining influence among them does not come from actual written law, as among the Hindus of other parts of India, or from a belief in any social philosophy present in the mind of a[illegible] the leaders of thought. It comes from the strong feeling of social propriety which the village has developed to a very high degree.

III.—FAMILY LIFE AMONG THE NĀYARS.

613 [425] The Nāyar family consists of all the descendants from the same ancestress, counting relationship exclusively from the side of the mother. Theoretically it may contain all those who have a common ancestry of this kind, but, in practice, when families grow unwieldy, they divide the common property and live under different roofs. Ordinary families consist of relations four or five degrees removed. The numerical strength of the family varies. In old and aristocratic families one finds sometimes fifty to eighty people, though one or two families can be mentioned in Malabar which contain one hundred and fifty to two hundred people.

The undivided family generally lives under the same roof. In the house itself only the females live, while the male members of the family occupy rooms set apart for them, or, if they are rich, live in houses in neighbouring compounds. The Nāyar 351/ house has always a large piece of enclosed ground in front of it, which is called 613 *Muttam*. Often it is used as an ornamental garden, and no man of the lower caste may enter it. There the children walk about and play in daytime, and the women have their dance and general merriment in the evening. Behind the house is a vegetable garden and a bathing tank, which is reserved exclusively for women. [562] The dominant idea in the arrangement of the house is the proper separation of sexes in the family.

613 421 [179] The family owns property in common. What a private individual earns belongs to him exclusively, but when he dies it is joined to the rest of the family, according to the old Nāyar law which is still prevalent in some parts.[1] When the

[1] Legal tendency has been to modify this practice.

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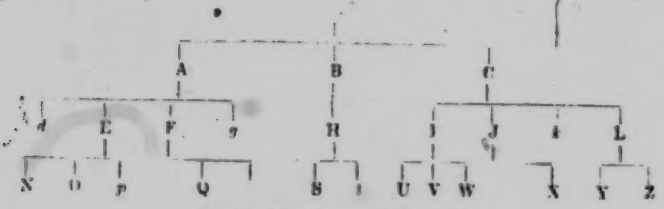
When the family becomes unwieldy, or certain members show insubordination, the family property is partitioned equally among *each female line*. That is to say, if there are three sisters in the family, each having daughters and granddaughters, the partition is done in such a way that each of the ancestresses founds a separate family among whom the original property is equally divided. It is best explained by a diagram :—



[Capital letters stand for women.]

In this case, supposing A, B and C dead, and the eldest male member *d*, being *Karnavan*, the male members, *t*, *k* and others demand partition. The joint property will be divided equally into three parts, each of the groups, in spite of their numerical difference, getting equal shares. Now, in the first group, there are two subdivisions to be made, while, in the third group, the property has to be further divided into three. Group 2 has only one female line, and, therefore, in that line, the property remains intact.

The partition of property does not affect the relationship. The members of a divided family are still called by the classificatory names, and a birth or death in one family creates pollution to the whole stock. Centuries might pass, but they would still remain strictly exogamous groups, and the rights of relationship (such as pollution, etc.) would continue, though in a lesser degree. There are many instances in which, though family partition took place at least a hundred and fifty years ago, the members continue to call each other brothers and sisters, as if they were the nearest blood relations.

It may be noticed in this connection that a Nāyar young man or woman is not supposed to talk to any relations of the opposite sex in the same family *if they are of almost the same age*. A younger brother can talk to a sister considerably older than himself ; but under no conditions may he talk to a younger one, and in orthodox families this restriction is carried so far that if it is known that a brother is standing somewhere near, the sister scrupulously avoids him. It is the custom that after the *Talikettu kalyanam* the brother (own and collateral alike) is not supposed to see, talk to, or be in the same room with his sister. This involves considerable inconvenience, for, if the mother is dead and there is no one of *her generation* living, a man loses all touch with the family, because his sisters and women of that generation may not speak to him, and he may not go near them. In such cases, it is customary

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613 for young men to go and stay in their wives' houses and visit their own families 593 for business arrangements.

Authority in the family is wielded by the eldest member, who is called *kārnavan*. 613 He has full control of the common property, and manages the income very much [421 as he pleases. He arranges marriages (*sambandhams*) for the boys as well as the [584] girls of the family. He had till lately full power (at least in practice) of alienating anything that belonged to them. His will was undisputed law. This is, perhaps, what is intended to be conveyed by the term *Matri-potestas* in communities of female [604] descent. But it should be remembered that among the Nāyars the autocrat of the family is not the mother, but the mother's brother.

613 421 The power of the *Kārnavan* over the family property has always been, in theory, limited, because the property was supposed to belong to every member of the family jointly. Till lately, however, it was practically impossible to limit the *Kārnavan's* power of mortgaging or even fully alienating it, because when it came to litigation the *Kārnavan* always pleaded that such action as he took was necessary for the welfare of the family, and justified himself by basing his arguments "on the discretionary power" vested in him. However, the old theory has lately been asserted in law that a *Kārnavan* can sell or mortgage the property only with the consent of the other members of the family.

All the moneys owing to the family can be paid only through him. He alone can give permission for the use of what belongs to the family. He can punish all the members of the family, either by depriving them temporarily of their allowance, or by prohibiting them to enter the house. In short, he is virtually the head of a tribe rather than the senior member of a family.

613 *The Wife of the Kārnavan.*—The wife of the *Kārnavan* has no standing in the 604 family; yet as is but natural, she is supposed to be a dark and sinister force working 829 against the interests of the *Tharawad*. Since she does not belong to the *Tharawad* of her husband she has no interest in its well-being, and it is generally supposed that the *Ammāri* (the wife of the maternal uncle) is interested only in getting as much out of her husband's family for her own children as her influence over her husband allows. All the tales told to children have as the villain the *Ammāvi*, whose position is not only that of the wife of the maternal uncle, but also the mother-in-law of the brother. She is universally considered to be a sort of sinister step-mother.

613 But it must be acknowledged that the Nāyar *Kārnavan* loves his sister's children 604 more than his own. The explanation of this apparently unnatural feeling lies in 586 two directions. First, the father is not necessarily of the same caste as the son. [564] Secondly, there is always the possibility of a break in the union. Divorce is not a matter of any difficulty among the Nāyars, both the husband and wife having equal right to announce such a termination of their connection whenever either of [593] the parties desires to do so. This instability of relationship is the principal reason

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why a man's affection for his own son is neither so intense nor so permanent as his affection for his sister's son.

Also, in matrilineal communities family tradition descends only through the sister's progeny. As the Nāyars formed a fighting aristocracy before the British conquest, they had naturally acquired family tradition, mottoes and arms, which descend of right only in the female line. Hence also a man looks to the training of his sister's sons to keep up his family tradition. All these contribute to an extraordinary, and at first sight inexplicable, tenderness towards the children of one's sister.

Relationship.[1]—Among the Nāyars the classificatory system of relationship is prevalent. When the ties of the family extend not only to one's immediate relations but to all who trace descent from the same ancestress in the female line, it is but natural that the terms of close relationship are used to all who belong to the family. As a matter of fact, the distinction between own brothers and collateral brothers does not exist. All the persons of your own generation older than you are called brothers, and equal respect is shown to them. They are called by such terms as big brother, small brother, etc., *only when they are older than* you. Those who are younger are always called by their names.

All women of your mother's generation are called mothers; those older than your mother are called *Peramma* or *Valiamma*, which means nominal mother or bigger mother, and those younger are called *Kochamma*, little mothers. But unlike among brothers, the distinction between one's mother and other females of the same generation is always maintained. Though respect is paid to all of them alike, own mother is always spoken of as mother, without qualification, and she alone has complete right to command you. Mother's own sisters are also different from those who are only collateral cousins to her. Mother's own brother and all of his generation are called *Ammaven* (literally mother's brother). Here also the distinction between own *Ammavan* and collateral *ammavan* was very slight in Nāyar society till nearly thirty years ago. Now, however, one looks more on one's own *Ammavan* as different from others, which is obviously due to the influence of the authority of direct relationship inculcated through the new system of education.[2]

The mother-in-law has no special name. This is, of course, due to the universal prevalence of first cross-cousin marriage. The mother-in-law is generally addressed

[1] Spencer and Gillen (*Native Tribes of Central Australia*, p. 88) try to prove that the classificatory terminology to express relationship shows the existence in some earlier time of group marriages. Perhaps it does so when such relationship terms are in use in a patrilineal community. On the other hand, in a matrilineal community such terms have nothing to do with the system of marriage, but only with relationship counted on the mother's side.

[2] Note specially: though all the women of the mother's generation stand in equal relationship, it is only the actual parent that is entitled to be called mother without any qualification to it. All the others are spoken of in comparative terms, as big mother, i.e., elder mother, small mother, i.e., younger mother.

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as *Ammavi Amma*, the first word being the same as the wife of the mother's brother, and the second an honorific addition to it. Dr. Rivers, in *Kinship and Social Organisation*, as well as in *Melanesian Society*, has conclusively shown that wherever first-cousin marriage prevails, there the mother-in-law has no special name. His explanation that this is due to the obvious fact that, in most cases, the mother's brother's wife is the same person as the mother-in-law, and that the former position was antecedent to the latter, is fully borne out by the terminology among the Nāyars.

Another relation of importance in the Nāyar family life is the father's sister. She has a special name and has a very special function to perform. In Middle Travancore she is called *Appachi*. Her importance varies according to the status of the father's family. If the father's family is one of greater importance than one's own, then the father's sister is a person to be consulted on various matters with regard to the child. In any case she should be the first to visit the new-born child. This is called "*Kannom Kalcha*." In the marriage ceremony also she has a prominent place.

Enangar.—The whole of Nāyar family life used to be based, though this has decayed of late, on the close relationship with one or more other families, spoken of as *Enangar* or Allies. A *Tharawad* with its *Enangars* formed *a social group* rarely marrying outside its fold and generally arranging all festivities and ceremonies between themselves. Neither funeral rites, nor marriage ceremony, nor even any one of the hundred other minor things which go to make up the ordinary life of a Nāyar family, can take place without the co-operation, or at least the presence, of a member from the *Enangar* or allied families. The *Enangar* families are always of the same sub-caste, with a right to eat with you and enter any part of your house.

The *Enangar* system is evidently a kinship organisation, forming an inter-marrying class. The question of its origin is a very difficult one. The prevalent opinion is that it originated in the days when Nāyars fought and farmed in alternate months, when a kinship organisation of some sort was very necessary for safety and success. This organisation has become very lax of late, though it cannot in any way be said to be dying out.

Marriage Restrictions.—The marriage restrictions prevalent among the Nāyars have nothing much peculiar from the rest of the Hindu society. The bride must always be younger than the man, and must in strict orthodoxy belong to the same generation as his. He may not marry his mother's sister's daughter, who is to him as his own sister. All his sisters, own and collateral, together with ladies of a previous generation in his family, form a legal incestuous group. A man has, therefore, to marry either entirely out of the circle of his relations, or from among his *cross-cousins*.

Cross-cousin marriage[1] is the orthodox custom. Your maternal uncle's

[1] By cross-cousins I mean children of brother and sister. The relationship is expressed by the word *Machuna*, which is, it should be noticed, the same as in the Toda language. Among

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daughter never calls you by any name which, in the Hindu code of manners, is done only with regard to the husband. She is your *a priori* wife, if such an expression could be used. She is spoken of as the *Mura Pennu* (*Mura* = customary, and *Pennu* = female or wife, meaning customary wife). 582

Unlike other Hindus a Nāyar may marry a girl from a lower sub-caste as long as she also is a Nāyar. He cannot marry a woman whose caste is higher than his own without the wife losing her caste. A Nāyar lady can choose her husband either from among the allied families or others, provided they are of the same or superior sub-caste. Also, she can marry from anyone of the higher castes, i.e., either from the Brahmins or from the Kshatriyas. The alliance between the Malabar Brahmins and the Nāyars is a social fact of very great interest. In no other part of India is a Brahmin allowed to marry out of his own caste. In Malabar, on the other hand, among the Nambudiris or the Aryan immigrants, only the eldest member of the family can marry among the Brahmins, the others being forced to marry among the Nāyars. The permanence through ages of matrilineal descent among the Nāyars is due to this fact. The Brahmins, being of a superior caste, and the Nāyar wife of the Brahmin being unable to live in her husband's family, the system tended to be matrilineal as well as matrilocal. Also, since the children of such a marriage are Nāyars and not Brahmins, though the father is a Brahmin, the system remained wholly unilateral without any definite bilateral development. It is only the very highest among the Nāyars that have connection with the Brahmins. Through their influence the custom preserved all its strength in the lower classes as well. 582 564

The peculiar custom of the Malabar Brahmins of not allowing their junior members to marry among their own caste introduces a complication into the Nāyar system. The idea underlying such a prohibition is evidently the preservation of the big estates which the Nampudiris own. Since the Nāyar sons of the Malabar Brahmins do not inherit anything from their fathers, their estates remain undivided and descend only to the eldest son. Primogeniture has been the custom in every country where the preservation of big landed property in the hands of a few was aimed at. The undivided family among the Nāyars is also meant to conserve their possession of the land and maintain the political influence resulting from it. A point of utmost importance which should always be kept in mind in this connection is the interaction of economic and social forces. The interest of the Nampudiris to keep their property undivided led to their custom of primogeniture, and this again induced them to use their temporal power and sacerdotal influence to perpetuate the matrilineal system among the Nāyars. Also, the desire to preserve the family estates as a whole, kept the Nāyar families from being divided, making thereby a change to patrilineal system altogether impossible. 428 564 582

the Todas also *Machuna* (or cross-cousin) marriage is the orthodox custom. See p. 512, Rivers, *The Todas*. Also Appendix, "Similarities between the Nāyars and the Todas." 582 197

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595 It is a point very keenly debated as to how far polyandry was prevalent among the Nāyars in olden days. During the last fifty years no trace of such a system has been found. It is to a certain extent true that there is extreme instability of marriage relationship among the commoner folk even now. But for a woman to have more [538] than one husband at a time *seems to have been against the moral ideas of the community even two hundred years ago.*[1] Nāyar ballads and poetry of that age contain many passages where polyandry is spoken of as a barbarous and unknown custom.

But though strict polyandry does not seem to have existed at any time, traces of a *system of supplementary spouses*, very much like the Pirauru custom among the Australians, exist even now. In the *Enangar* or allied families, which we have [613] noticed before, any woman of the same generation and in the same relationship as [621] cross-cousin is eligible for marriage, and even if she is married, the young man [582] whose spouse she might have been has certain rights—not distinctly conjugal, but still pertaining to it. He is the one who avenges her against insults. Her children call him "little father," and he has the right of entering any part of her apartments. Among the commoner folk a system of conjugal relationship may still exist. It is practically certain that this is a survival of the system of *supplementary spouses* such as we have in Australia and other places.

562 In this connection it may be interesting to notice the general position of women in Nāyar society. On *a priori* grounds we are inclined to assume that the position of women in matrilineal communities is higher than in patrilineal societies of the same standard of culture. How strongly this opinion is held will be seen from the fact that even in other parts of South India Malabar is spoken of as the "Land where women rule." It is impossible to make a general statement as to the relative status of women in matrilineal and patrilineal communities. But as far as the Nāyars are concerned, their women enjoy equality with men. They can hold property [871] in their own right and enter the professions they choose. Traditions of scholarship [875] and art are, perhaps, stronger among them than among men. Some of the best Malayalam poets and scholars have been Nāyar women, and at the present day the statistics of female education show a higher percentage of English-educated girls among them than among any other Indian community. All the girls' schools in Travancore are manned by them, and some of them hold such high administrative posts as inspectorships of girls' schools.

595 Polygamy was indeed prevalent, and is still legally permitted among the Nāyars. 562 But this, in my opinion, does not show an inferiority of status. Though the opinion of Nāyar women would strongly be against the wife of the Akikuyu chieftain who told Mrs. Routledge that she would like her husband to have as many wives as possible,[2] there is no reason to believe that the possession of more than one wife

[1] See Note 3 at the end. Appendix on "McLennan and the Nair Type of Polyandry."
[2] Among a Prehistoric People (Akikuyu).

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jars on the moral sense of either the man or the woman. The idea that monogamy necessarily means a higher stage of culture is indeed one of those *a priori* deductions which, though incapable of proof, are still held with dogmatic reverence. Even the curious and very interesting fact that among the Mormons (whose great fault was polygamy, according to those moralists who include monogamy among the Categorical Imperatives), it was the women who fought most strenuously for the maintenance of this custom, which they considered to be their most cherished privilege. It is an indubitable fact that where polygamy exists it is the women who are its chief advocates. The men, on the other hand, consider it a great bother. I have heard many rich men to whom proposals were made for a third or fourth marriage say "sufficient unto me are the evils of one wife." [1]

On the whole I am inclined to say that women in Malabar among the Nāyars at least enjoy, relatively to women elsewhere in India, greater liberty, with regard to individual conduct, family relationship and social life. This no doubt is due to the influence of matrilineal customs.

IV.—THE MARRIAGE CUSTOMS AMONG THE NĀYARS.

The marriage ceremonies of the Nāyars have always been peculiar. Anthropologists who have studied the Nāyars have, on the whole, failed to understand the significance of these customs. In this connection I propose to speak only of three chief points. First, *The Talikettu Kalyanam* (or the matrimonial ceremony of tying the Tali); secondly, the *Sambandham* (or marital relationship); and thirdly, *Polyandry*.

The *Talikettu Kalyanam*[2] is generally performed on a batch of girls of the same matrilineal family. The age of the eldest girl is generally eleven and rarely thirteen. The idea is that this ceremony should take place before the girl attains puberty.[3] But it is not only the children of the same family that can have a *Talikettu* with the others. The daughter of a male member of the family who belongs to an *enangar* clan or who is too poor to be able to afford the costly ceremony of *Talikettu*, can, with the permission of the *village community*, be placed in a separate seat and her *Tali* also may be tied at the same time.

When the ceremony could be performed, even when a girl is only six months old, it happens that in a *Talikettu Kalyanam* all the girls below eleven are disposed of at the same time. Therefore it takes at least another twelve years for a new batch

[1] See Lecky, *Democracy and Liberty*, chapter on Mormonism.

[2] The *Tali* is a piece of metal, generally silver or gold, which stands for marriage in all the communities who acknowledge Hinduism.

[3] Among the Nāyars social puberty differs considerably in point of time from physiological puberty. It is a matter of great importance that the former should precede the latter. Any family in which a girl attains her physiological puberty, as evidenced by her first menses, before she had attained her social puberty, is socially outside the pale.

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to grow up. There is one important custom (and Mr. Ananta Krishna Aiyer forgets to notice it)[1] which forbids two generations of girls being married together. When girls become mothers at sixteen, generations mingle frequently and often there may be girls younger than oneself who are one's mother's sisters and, therefore, stand logically in the same position as one's mother. The custom is that they should not undergo the ceremony together, though this is strictly kept up only in richer families.

The first step to this ceremony is a village and *enangar* council. The prominent people of the village and the *enangars* are invited and the *Kārnavan* takes counsel with them as to the various arrangements with regard to the ceremony. After the *Kaniyan*, or the medicine man (who is also the astrologer and magician), has fixed the auspicious hour for the ceremony, a *pandal*, or a decorated tent, is put up in the presence of the village elders, in the *Muttam*. In the middle of the tent so erected is kept the *Astamangalyam* (Sanskrit word *Asta*=8, *mangalyam*=happiness giving). The *Astamangalyam* consists of a measure of paddy, some rice, an absolutely white cloth (to show purity), an arrow (to show the warlike character), lighted lamp (uninterrupted prosperity), a looking-glass, and a *cheppu* (which is the Malabar equivalent of a powder puff), and a blossom of the coco-nut palm.

The ceremony of *Talikettu* can take place any time of the day, only it must be an auspicious hour. Evening is preferred because more gaiety is possible. Early in the morning the girls are taken to the family tanks by the women of the *Enangar* house, and have an oil bath. After this they are elaborately dressed. They put on various ornaments used only for that day. All the families, of course, do not possess these ornaments; generally, only one or two families in the village have them, but they are available for all on such occasions.

The tier of the *Tali*, who is generally a priest, or sometimes a Kshatriya lord, is invited, and he stops at a house near by. The day before the ceremony he goes, accompanied by the village elders on an elephant, in a procession to the nearest temple and gets the *Tali* consecrated by the priest of the temple. In these days I have seen the *Tali*-tier taken in a motor car to the temple, though the slow-moving elephant is more impressive.

At the auspicious hour the bridegroom, in a warrior's dress (with sword, etc.), arrives at the house, accompanied by a party of the villagers. He is welcomed by the male members of the family, and taken to a seat of honour. There the brother (own or collateral) of the girls washes his feet (this is a custom of extreme politeness prevalent among the Hindus). Then the brides are brought into the *pandal*. They make a *pradikshana* (go round the *pandal* by their left three or seven times). The eldest girl's father's sister's son (*i.e.*, her marriageable cousin) gives some brand-new pieces of fine silk cloth, and then the priest or the warrior ties the *Tali* round the girls' necks. This is followed by a huge feast which goes on for four days. On

[1] *Castes Tribes and Castes*, vol. ii, chapter on the Nāyars.

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the fourth day this mock marriage is dissolved by cutting to pieces the cloth which was given to them the first day. 588

The *Kalyanam* days are the gayest in the family, and when it is over women keep on saying, "Ah, it takes another twelve years for this to come."

What is the significance of this custom? It must be said to start with that it has no significance in these days. At least, for the last seventy-five years it has been merely a meaningless ceremony, a survival of a peculiar system of marriage. The tendency in these days has been to abolish it, though the movement to do so has not gained much influence, except in the higher families. 174 182 588

The significance of this custom in ancient days seems to have been this. It is necessary to say that a system of sexual relationship, the laxity of which made it in many cases indistinguishable from promiscuity, seems to have been prevalent among the Nāyars, even as late as the eighteenth century. The literature of the time abounds in allusions as to how fickle ladies jilted their husbands and married others. A child was supposed to be legitimate as long as a man was willing to meet the expenses of child delivery, and that phrase still survives as a form of reproach against a father who does not treat his son well. A chorus of foreign, as well as Indian evidence, however, proves that sexual relations in the higher families were of a more or less permanent character, and were generally monoganious. [851] [595]

The *Talikettu* ceremony was, under these conditions, the actual and religious marriage. After that custom the girl was allowed to choose her own suitor, and when such a suitor, who was her husband, dies, she does not mourn his death, or become a widow, while, when the man who actually tied the *Tali* dies she undergoes certain formalities of mourning. Also the man who tied the *Tali*, though he never sees the girl again, is called "little father" by all the members of the family. All these go to prove that the actual marriage ceremony was the *Talikettu*. It must be remembered that *Tali* (an ornament round the neck) is a symbol of marriage for all Hindus, and among Brahmins all over India the *Tali* round the neck is only broken when the husband dies. If this, then, was the real marriage, what was the actual position occupied by the priest or warrior who tied the *Tali*? The fact that he is conducted to the house after the ceremony seems to point to at least a latent conjugal right. It is quite conceivable that in the days of child marriage this ceremony implied perhaps more than a theoretical right, though, during at least the last hundred years, nothing more than the form has been observed. In this connection it is well to remember a like ceremony performed with great festivities among the *Deva-Dasis* or the "Temple-girls" in other parts of India. They also have a form of marriage which lasts for four days. On each day the girl puts on the dress of the women of different communities, and sits in a big hall, where are gathered together all the women of her local community. This ceremony, it seems, must precede before the girl devotes her life to "temple service." Since the Nāyar women, in olden days, do not seem to have had any settled form of marriage, and were free to [765] [171]

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589 182 174 cast off one husband and choose another, the religious rites of marriage had to be performed without any definite marital relationship with any particular man. This seems to be the explanation of *Talikettu Kalyanam*.

582 564 585 The real marriage *de jure* and *de facto* is the *Sambandham*. "*Sambandham*" is a Sanskrit word, meaning good and close union. A Nāyar girl can have *Sambandham* not only with a Nāyar man, but with Brāhmins and Kshatriyas. As a matter of fact the whole system of Nāyar customs seems to have been regulated to suit the purpose of the Nampudiri Brahmins. It must be remembered that a very strict system of primogeniture is prevalent among the Nampudiris, and only the eldest male member in a Nampudiri family marries from among his own caste. Only in case the eldest has no issue, or is incapable of having any, is it that one of his brothers gets the chance to marry in his own community. Generally, therefore, the younger sons of a Nampudiri family marry among the Nāyars. It must also be remembered [554] that it is considered an honour reserved only for the highest Nāyar families to be allied to Nampudiri families by marriage.

585 The *Sambandham* customs are of the simplest nature. If the suitor is a Brahmin he goes and tells the *Kārnavan* of his desire to marry the girl. The *Kārnavan* then consults the astrologer for an auspicious date, and informs the village elders. The Brahmin brings some *Pudaka* (*i.e.*, clothes which the wife wears) and hands them over to the girl in the presence of her relations and the neighbours, and it is duly announced that they are married.

[582] If the suitor is a Nāyar he is generally the girl's father's sister's son. As we have said before, this is considered to be the most proper marriage. In this case it must be remembered the head of the suitor's family approaches the girl's uncle with a proposal that such marriage is eminently desirable, and the *Kārnavan* informs all the necessary people, and the *Pudaka* is given without much ceremony. It is when a stranger wants to marry in the family that all the formalities have to be gone through. Then all the village and all people in any way related are informed and, in the case of rich families, invited to a feast on the auspicious day. After an elaborate and sumptuous meal the village headman and family elders assemble in a hall. A lighted lamp is placed in the middle, and before it a plantain leaf with rice, betel-nut, lemons and spices. The bridegroom is ushered in here nearly half an hour before the ceremony, and he comes accompanied by some members of his family and the chief men of his village. There is a sort of social reunion for some time, and when the auspicious moment arrives, the bride, accompanied either by her mother (or, in some parts, by her mother's brother's wife) enters and approaches the bridegroom. In ordinary cases the bridegroom stands up and takes the clothes which some of his party had brought for him and gives them to the bride. In some cases the uncle of the bridegroom gives them to the mother of the girl.

The ceremony is now supposed to be over. The bride retires with her mother, and for some time a general conversazione, including sometimes recitals of odes,

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vocal music, etc., goes on. One by one the guests soon depart, and the bridegroom stays in his wife's house for a few days. It must be remembered that the Nāyars are a strictly matrilocal community, though the custom shows a laxity in these days.

The *Sambandham* customs are not the same all over Malabar. They vary considerably in details, but the principle is the same all over. *Sambandham* in itself, though recognised as legal, has not the binding effect of a proper marriage. It is in theory dissoluble at will, and often it happens that, due either to misunderstanding or quarrel, either of the parties breaks off relations. In such a case, the marriage is deemed to have ended, and the aggrieved party can, without further formality, marry anybody else. The legal position is slightly altered in Travancore. By the Nāyar Regulation Act of 1912 it was enacted that if a man wants to break off his marriage relations with a woman to whom he was united by a properly conducted *Sambandham* he has to give her six months' notice and provide for the maintenance of her children by him (till they attain their twelfth year, unless the mother marries in the meantime). But this law has very little influence, and marriages and divorces go on in the same free fashion as before. In British Malabar, there is the Malabar Marriage Act of Sir C. Sankaran Nayar, the present Educational Member of the Imperial Government, by which a Nāyar entering into a *Sambandham* with a Nāyar woman can, if the parties choose to do so, register their union as a marriage to which ordinary marriage laws apply. This has been found very ineffective, for in the last twenty years during which it has been in force only six marriages have been registered, and all of them have been in the family of its distinguished author.

Before such laws came to be enacted (and to a very great extent even now) there has been singular freedom of marriage and divorce among the Nāyars. The men that a girl could possibly marry were strictly restricted by certain conditions. A Nāyar girl is not allowed to contract a marriage with men of a lower subcaste. She can marry either in her own subcaste or in castes above hers. She is not allowed to marry one who is not at least two years older than herself. She cannot marry anyone who shares pollution with her (that is descended from the same ancestress on the maternal side, however remote). There are cases when the common ancestress lived nearly four hundred years ago, but still her descendants are supposed to be so closely related in blood as to preclude matrimonial relationship of any sort.

The husband visits the wife's house after dinner, and this does not cause any particular inconvenience, as, till lately, marriage was restricted to people of one's own village or of its immediate neighbourhood. But in these days the tendency is strongly patrilocal, though ancient and aristocratic families still refuse to send their ladies out of the house. To keep within one's own house is considered to be a specially aristocratic privilege.

The question of polyandry among the Nāyars is a much debated point. This can be said with certainty: there has been no authenticated case of it at least for the last fifty years.

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the last fifty years. All the evidence that we have of this custom among the Nāyars in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, are from foreign travellers who, it must be remembered, were not allowed to come within sixty yards of a Nāyar house. Their evidence, therefore, is an extremely unsatisfactory ground for dogmatising on Nāyar customs. On the other hand, the extensive Malayalam literature of that period contains no single allusion to polyandry. The works of Kunchan Nambiar, whom it is no exaggeration whatever to compare to Molière, though he describes minutely the social life of the Nāyars of the early eighteenth century with its laxity of morals, redeemed only by chivalry of conduct, makes no mention whatever of polyandry. On the other hand, in a famous passage he makes the declaration: "It is against the laws of all castes for a woman to have four or five husbands."

Nalanchu barthavoru thikku thanatu
Nalu jatikkum Viddhichatallorknnam.

How far this statement is decisive it is difficult to say. But one thing seems to be clear from it, that the idea in itself was repugnant to the community as a whole, though individuals might have practised it here and there.[1]

V.—Birth and Funeral Ceremonies.

Among the Nāyars, as among all the people whose life is regulated by magico-religious customs, child-birth is an event of great and mysterious significance. Especially is this the case with regard to the first child. Therefore the ceremonies of nativity are of an intenser and more magical character during the time of the first pregnancy than during subsequent ones. Indeed, the mysterious nature of childbearing is entirely lost after the first time, and the ceremonies on subsequent occasions are only a few tabus, which are generally, in the phraseology of Van Genepp, "rites dynamistes directs et negatives."

The most important of the pre-natal ceremonies is *Pulicudi*,[2] or the drinking of the tamarind juice; and the customs relating it are as follows: On the appointed day all the *enangars* (people belonging to the same kingship organization) come to the house early in the morning, and the pregnant woman is taken out by one of them and bathed, after rubbing oil all over her. Then she is dressed for the occasion and, entering the house from the north, sits looking eastward. The astrologer, who being of a lower caste commonly stands in the outer courtyard, calculates the auspicious hour. He sends word when the time is come, and the *Ammāri* (the wife of the mother's brother, and mother-in-law by right of the brother) pours a few drops of tamarind juice in a small silver bowl. The brother or the uncle of the

[1] See Note 3, Appendix.

[2] Dr. Rivers makes some obviously erroneous deductions based upon this word, for which see note on "The Similarities between Nāyars and the Todas," Appendix, Note 2.

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pregnant woman, taking a sword, generally kept for this purpose, and holding it in the left hand points it to her mouth. The juice is then poured on it in such a way as to fall by drops into her open mouth. After this, one of the women of the *enangu* group smears the body and head of the pregnant woman with coco-nut oil and takes her to the tank. She is also required to choose one from a collection of different grains, and it is believed you can say from the choice what the sex of the child is going to be.

The significance of the ceremony seems to be twofold. First, it is the official notification to the allied families as well as to the local village groups of the fact that a woman is lawfully pregnant in the house. The intervention of the *Ammāri* or the mother's brother's wife is supposed to show that everything is as it ought to be. It is, therefore, in the first place merely a social announcement. Secondly, the actual ceremony with the sword is supposed to have the effect of making the child a warrior, and it is believed to impart the virtues of bravery, manliness and honest dealing. It is, therefore, in the classification of Van Genepp, a rite direct, sympathetic, automatic and positive. The tamarind juice is believed to create sensitiveness and honour. It is a "contagionist" rite. Whenever a man shows cowardice, the question that is asked as a mark of contempt is: "Were you not born after *Pulicudi?*" or "did not your mother drink the tamarand juice?"

After the *Pulicudi* there are many prohibitions which a pregnant woman has to respect. Of this the most important is the absolute sexual tabu which dates from the *Pulicudi* to forty days after the childbirth. Other tabus are mainly connected with food and are mostly "contagionist" positively or negatively. Thus the woman is not supposed to take very warm food, as it might scorch the head of the child; she is not supposed to eat much hot food (chilis, pepper, etc.), because it might put out the eyes of the child. There are no definite rules about these, but every mother in her desire to do the child no possible harm keeps herself away from all doubtful matter.

After the birth of the child there is a mild pollution (as compared to the strong untouchable pollution caused by death) in the family. This pollution does not carry any disabilities except the prohibition to enter any sacred precincts. On the fifteenth day there is a purificatory ceremony, but there are no festivities or celebrations connected with it.

The mother and the child are accommodated in a special room which no man may enter. Unmarried girls, unless they are little children, are also not allowed to go near. The child, of course, can be seen by all after the cutting and burying of the umbilical cord. It is handed round to the father and other interested relations. No kind of food except the mother's milk is given to it, and, if the mother died at the birth of the child, it is generally given the milk of some relations or even of outsiders who have children of almost the same age. The person whose milk the child thus drinks, though she be an outsider, is considered equal to its own mother, and her children are considered the same as own brothers. There is a story of a Nāyar

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853 846 608 king who as a child lost his mother and was therefore fed on the milk of an attendant woman, refusing to punish her son after repeated acts of treason on the ground that an ocean of milk flowed between them which a drop of blood would pollute for ever.

852 301 789 On the twenty-eighth day the child undergoes two ceremonies. The first is called *Erupathettu Kettuka*, or the "Tying of the twenty-eighth day." Before that day the child is not allowed to wear any ornaments. On the twenty-eighth day a silver or gold belt, or a mere cord with an ornament in the shape of a heart or a laurel leaf at the front, is tied to the waist of the child. The laurel leaf was most certainly meant as a charm in ancient days, while now it is nothing more than an ornament. The waist-belt occasionally has attached to it amulets made sacred by the repetition of *mantrams* or magical formulæ over it. Such amulets are worn for the purpose of preventing disease and keeping the child safe from the demons and other evil spirits.[1]

553 787 After this comes the name-giving ceremony. The astrologer announces the star under which the child is born and presents the horoscope. Then he mentions the initial letters of the names. Each star has generally two or three letters, and the whole of Sanskrit and Malayalam can be drawn upon for the names of deities beginning with those letters. The choice is really very wide, even with the most difficult initial letters.

852 602 431 [824] The child is not supposed to be carried out of its mother's family till the sixth month. Then, on an auspicious day it is taken to the father's house (if the father is a Nāyar) by the mother, with some tokens of respect to the father's sister. These presents generally are tobacco leaves (always a mark of respect among the Nāyars), betel, etc. The father's family generally gives a certain sum of money for the expenses of the coming ceremony.

852 242 [123] [613] These proceedings are preliminary to the ceremony of *Choru Koda*, or the giving of rice. For the first six months the child is given only the cooked flour of dried plantain fruits. Rice, which is the chief food of the Nāyars, is strictly prohibited before the *Choru Koda*. As a boy of fourteen or fifteen, I have many times officiated in this ceremony, on one occasion as a member of the father's family and on others as a member of the maternal *Tharawad*. What is done is that the child is taken to the temple by its mother, accompanied by some women of the *Enangu* group, together with a male representative from the father's house (if the father is a Nāyar) and one from the mother's own family. There is an offering to the god of the temple in the form of rice cooked with milk and sugar, and all the party, after purifying

[782] [783]

[291] [114] [1] The question of origins is very difficult, yet we cannot pass without noticing the idea that the loin cords are the beginnings of dress. Professor Wilhelm Wundt, in his well-known book on *The Elements of Folk Psychology*, has shown conclusively that it has no reference to the development of clothing, but is entirely magical in its purpose (pp. 86–87). The prevalent custom among the Nāyars supports this view. The custom can be understood only in relation to the general beliefs about cord-magic and the efficacy of amulets attached to waistbands.

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themselves by bathing in the temple tank, come to the *Darsana* (the aspect towards which the face of the image looks). There the priest brings the offering and the male member from either the father's family or the mother's own family takes a little of it on his pointing finger and gives it to the child. The child is supposed to inherit the qualities of the person who gives it the sacred rice, an idea allied to the superstition concerning godfather and godchild. There is, of course, a feast on the day at the child's house.

"Chaque société générale," says M. Van Gennep, "peut être considéré comme une sorte de maison devisée en chambres et en couloirs. . . . Chez les demi-civilisés ces compartiments sonts soigneusement isolés les unes des autres et pour passer de l'un à l'autre des formalités et des cérémonies sont nécessaires." This idea that in semi-civilised societies stages of life are marked out with great precision so that the passage from one to another necessitates ceremonies or "rites de passage" is applicable only in a very limited sense in the case of the Nāyars. Among them such ceremonies are few and very far between. The male children, after the *Churu Koda*, or the rice-giving ceremony just now described, have only one other ceremony to perform which is called *Sasty-Purty*, or the fullness of sixty years. Between his sixth month and his sixtieth year a male member of the Nāyar Society has no *rites de passage* to pass through. The *Sasty-Purty*, which takes place on his sixtieth birthday, is a sort of jubilee, after which respectable people are supposed to retire from worldly life. It is indeed a *rite de passage*.

Women have naturally more ceremonies than men. Apart from the *Talikettu* (described in the last chapter) a Nāyar woman has to pass through the ceremonies of *Tirundu Kuli* (bathing after the first menses) and *Pulicudi* described above. After she has become a mother a woman can be said to be free from all ceremonies till her sixtieth year, when, after a *Sasty-Purty*, she also retires from active life.

The Nāyar funeral ceremonies are of a very complex nature. They show a great deal of Hindu ideas about soul and re-birth mixed with purely Nāyar beliefs about *Pretrams*, ghosts, etc., etc. It is important, in this connection, to notice at the very start that the Nāyars make a clear distinction between the ceremonies performed at the death of the eldest member of the family and those at the death of others. The following is the procedure generally adopted at the death of a Nāyar. As soon as a person dies he is bathed and clad in white, and laid on a bed made of long plantain leaves. If it is the eldest male or female member of the family that is dead, then all their relations on the matrilineal side present new cotton cloths, with which the corpse is covered and tied before it is taken to be burnt. Only the eldest members are burnt; others are buried. Apart from the greater importance attached to the death of the eldest members, the ordinary funeral rites are in essentials the same.

The presence of the *Mārān* (a particular caste among the Nāyars who perform the lesser priestly functions) is absolutely necessary on the occasion. He is sent for as

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764 [564] soon as death has taken place in a house, and on his arrival undertakes the general management of the ceremonies.

After the corpse is tied and laid on the plantain leaves, a ceremony called *Para Nirathuka* takes place. (*Para* is a measure of paddy, and *Nirathuka* means to place in line.) A coconut-oil lamp is lit and placed at the head of the corpse and immediately in front of it are placed three *paras* of rice. The significance of this ceremony is unknown to me.

766 *Ceremonies of Cremation.*—If the deceased is the eldest of a family the body is now cremated. A pyre is made of mango wood, and the corpse is placed with its head towards the south (the god of death, according to the Hindu mythology, resides in the south), and then covered with fuel. The nephew or younger brother lights the fire. Then all the members of the family and all others who have been polluted by contact with them go and bathe in the tank. During the process of burning there is a process called *Kumba pradikshanam*—which is manifestly an Aryan custom (*Kumbham* and *Pradikshanam* are two Sanskrit words: the first means a pot, and the second means to walk round). The ceremony, as its name implies, consists of walking round the pyre with a pitcher, the bottom of which is pierced. One of the family fills this pitcher with water and carries it three times round the burning corpse, dashing it on the ground at the end.

765 Two or three members of the family continue to perform funeral rites for the next fourteen days. As I have not taken part in it I do not possess first-hand knowledge.

765 783 [564] For all the fourteen days, all the members of the family are under pollution. The pollution, in the case of death, is very strong. All the members of the family are untouchable, and any Nāyar who touches them must purify himself by a bath. On the fourteenth day is the purificatory ceremony. The *Mārān* comes in the morning and gives everyone some oil. After smearing the body with these everyone goes and bathes, and comes back clad in white. The *Mārān* then sprinkles holy water, and a Brahmin priest purifies the house. There is generally a big feast for two days.

765 526 The feast on the fifteenth day is accompanied by some sports. All the men of the neighbouring villages come for it, and there is great *tamasha*. How far this could be identified with funeral sports elsewhere it is hard to say.

785 787 788 765 [527] After these feastings one of the family undertakes a *Diksha* (which means a vow) for forty-one[1] days or a whole year. During this time, the man who undertakes the *Diksha* lives apart with a Brahmin. He is not allowed to talk to or see a woman. He must not cut his hair or his nails. He must bathe twice a day in the river, or in the tank, and lead a pure and pious life. If it is only for forty-one days, there is not much feasting at the end of it. If it goes on for a full year, there is a huge celebration,

[1] All ordinary vows are taken for forty-one days. If you want to placate a deity you pray to him for forty-one days. If you want to make a big sacrifice it extends to forty-one days, etc.

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with all kind of sports.[1] The family, which is supposed to have been in mourning during the whole period, goes back to its normal life.

M. Van Gennep considers the state of mourning as "Un état de marge pour les survivants, dans lequel ils entrent des rites de séparation, et d'où ils sortent par des rites de réintegration dans la société général (rites de levée du deuil)."[2] With regard to the first fourteen days in particular, a Nāyar family in mourning constitutes a special society. During this period, and to a certain extent to the period till the final rites (forty-one days, or one year) social life is suspended. The ceremony at the end of the year is then a *rite de réintegration*.

VI.—RELIGION AND MAGIC AMONG THE NĀYARS.

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The religious beliefs of the Nāyars show an extraordinary mixture of Hindu and Dravidian cults. All the temples are dedicated to Krishna, Siva, or Kartyayani. There are also a few *kavus*, or groves, for the worship of the lesser Hindu deities. But the important point with regard to this is that the Nāyars are, as a whole, a people almost without a religion,[3] and they use Hindu temples for practices which receive no sanction even in the generous vagueness of that creed. The religious conceptions of Hinduism have but the slightest influence on the Nāyar community as a whole. It is quite true that there are a good many devout Hindus among the Nāyars, but the very fact that the distinction of Saiva-ism, Sakti-ism, Vaishnava-ism, etc., have not reached them, is sufficient proof that, though they have been Hinduised in form and have belonged to the Hindu fold, their primitive beliefs have survived to a great extent.

Nothing shows so much the extreme persistence of primitive culture, even in the face of higher civilising agencies, than the wide and almost universal acceptance of spirit-worship, and the almost entire absence of religious life among the Nāyars after at least twenty centuries of contact with Hinduism. Their contact with religions has not been limited indeed to Hinduism. The Jews, flying after the destruction of their Temple, found refuge among the Nāyars, and have lived in their midst for nigh two thousand years. The Apostle St. Thomas is supposed to have planted a community of Syrian Christians among them, who also have lived side by side with the Nāyars as their social inferiors in Malabar for almost the same length of time. Ever since Mohamed founded his religion in Arabia, Allah has found faithful worshippers in Malabar who moved with equal status among the Nāyar population. The beautiful creed of Gautama Buddha had for long its devout votaries in the land of the Nāyars, and traces of Buddhist monasteries and survivals of Buddhist worship still

[1] There is a story about a poet who enjoyed this celebration very much and said to the master of the house, "I hope there will be one like this here every year."

[2] *Rites de Passage*, p. 211.

[3] See the discussion following.

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771 177 abound. The militant Romanism of the Holy Inquisition, and the no less militant Protestantism of the Dutch, had their chance, in turn, for at least a century and a half. Yet, with all the great religions of the world to choose between during the last two thousand years, it is nothing short of marvellous to see the Nāyars, who have, it must be remembered, assimilated a very great deal of the material and intellectual culture of their neighbours, and, more than that, excelled them in literature and music, still maintain with undiminished vigour their spirit-worship, black-magic, and demoniacal ceremonies, and are devoid of almost every element of true religious life.

791 We may be accused of the narrow use of a wide word in the phraseology of Tylor when we deny that the Nāyars have any religion apart from a veneer of Hindu influence. Their beliefs are mainly magical. Here, of course, I am treading on very dangerous ground, dangerous even to the initiated, but fatal to the novice. In this essay I have taken the distinction between religion and magic as being primarily a question of method rather than of intention or possible effect. The 791 orthodox French opinion that the difference between magic and religion is that 114 the latter is social while the former is anti-social, has been proved by Mr. E. S. Hartland and Dr. Marett to be wholly untenable; while the contention of Dr. Marett himself[1] is that the difference between magic and religion lies in the attitude of society towards them.[2]

771 Among the Nāyars there is an implicit distinction between practices to propitiate 782 a god and those with which to bully a spirit. Bullying a spirit for purposes of social 114 benefit I have not considered to be religion, though it is recognised by society as beneficial and therefore according to Dr. Marett should be considered as religious—because it does not possess the emotional and the psychological elements which

[1] *Anthropology*, p. 210 (Home Univ. Series).

[2] Dr. Marett has recently expressed his view thus:—

"The dominant social tradition tolerates in a community only certain practices and the beliefs associated with them. These may be said to constitute the religion of the community. It does not matter whether they embody customs such as sacrifice and prayer which are essential to the civilised man's notion of *his* religion, or whether they involve processes of sympathetic magic, etc., such as have for us become disreputable.

"On the other hand, when resort is had to the supernaturalistic means in order to gain selfish and anti-social ends we may speak of magic." (Class Lecture on Primitive Morals.)

Here Dr. Marett seems to go back to the French view and hold that the difference between magic and religion is that the former is selfish and anti-social while the latter is disinterested and social. The view here submitted is different. It is submitted that primitive society understands the difference between magical and religious customs even when both are essentially social and disinterested. To the primitive mind, the difference between religion and magic lies in the method and procedure of the ceremonies, or, as we shall now call them, the ritual. As method and procedure only reflect the mental state of the performer and the society to the benefit of which these ceremonies are performed, this difference is essentially psychological. This position is better explained by the Nāyar customs and beliefs noted below.

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Dr. Marett himself has, with great truth, insisted on as the essence of religion.[1] I have called such practices magical, not only because they lack the emotional and the psychological elements of religion, but also because the fundamental presupposition in such performances is the power wielded by the magician, the "*orenda*" which he has acquired, over the ghosts.

This is very clear from the Nāyar ideas of *Thēvar* and *Pisāchu*. *Thēvar* can be propitiated but never conquered; while a *Pisāchu* (or ghost), though superior to man in power, intelligence and will-to-do-harm, can be rendered harmless and kept under control by magical practices. The former conception is clearly Hindu and relates only to Hindu gods. The spiritual ideas of the Nāyars themselves seem to be confined to ghosts, spirits, and to a comic elf called *Kutti-Chāttan*.

Before we proceed to consider them, the position of the magician in the Nāyar community has to be made clear. It is generally taken for granted by anthropological writers that wherever social life is regulated by magical practices the *Shaman* comes to be held in reverence. It is very interesting, therefore, to notice that the Nāyars never accepted the superiority of the magician, and never accorded him any privilege. The magico-medicine man is, on the other hand, considered to be a sort of servant-in-attendance on a nobleman's family, something like a family doctor. The explanation that it is due to the warlike character of the Nāyars is clearly inapplicable, as the magician attained kingly powers among the Masai, for example, whose society is also organised for purposes of war. The fact that the *Kāniyān* (or the magico-medicine-man) is not only not venerated, but actually considered an inferior, may be more due to the effect of caste-system, which places Nāyars high among the social scale.

The *Kāniyān* is, of course, recognised as a necessary person. He gets from all the houses of the village settled remuneration, mostly in coco-nuts. He is not otherwise paid for ordinary consultation, and he is bound to attend to every case in the village without fail. For special exertions of his magical powers he has special payments settled by village custom. He has power, both inherited and acquired, to cast-off spirits, to perform preventive magic, and keep general control over ghosts.

There are supposed to be three kinds of spirits, *Prētam*, *Bhutam*, and *Pisāchu*. A *Prētam* is the spirit of a dead man. The ghosts of men who died in the ordinary course of events are not really *Prētams*, because they do not wander about to overpower people and drink their blood. It is generally the ghosts of men who died as a result of foul play, or by accidents such as drowning, or by terrible diseases such as smallpox and cholera that wander about at nights. A *Bhutam* is seen generally in marshy districts and does not always hurt people unless they go very near him. A *Pisāchu* is a general spirit of the air causing such diseases as smallpox. All these

[1] Threshold of Religion: Essays on Pre-animistic Religion, the Birth of Humility, and Is Tabu negative magic?

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spirits can be seen. At night their mouth is full of fire of different colours, but it throws out no rays. That it throws out no rays is important because therein is supposed to lie the distinction between an ordinary light and the fire in the mouth of a spirit.

The *Prētam* is supposed to hover round its burial place or the place of its accident. Everyone is warned off such a place at night time. The hours during which these *Prētams* appear are between 9 in the evening and 3 in the morning. It must be noticed here that the *Prētam* of a "black-magician," as distinct from a social magician like the *Kāniyān*, has more power to do mischief: it has more "*orenda*," so to say. The man who practises black magic invariably dies a violent death, and his *Prētam* hovers round the scene of his former activities.

"Man dreads above everything else," says S. Reinach,[1] "illness and death, punishments inflicted by the angry spirits with which his imagination peoples this world." This is absolutely true with regard to the Nāyars. Disease is generally believed either to be the outcome of offending a god or due to the magic performance of interested relations. Preventive sacrifice is very common, and every year all respectable Nāyar families perform some sort of propitiation ceremonies in the village temple. If a whole village is ravaged by some epidemic, the villagers inquire into the matter through the astrologer, and if he finds, as he usually does, that it is due to the wrath of the village god or goddess, ceremonies of various kinds are at once undertaken and goats are offered as sacrifice, and sometimes a *Desavalathu*, a procession of the people with images, around the village is performed.

But such occurrences are rare. Only epidemics are put down to the wrath of offended gods. Other diseases as well as misfortunes are put down to the influence of *Prētams*, bribed into action by jealous or covetous relatives. When any great misfortune, such as a succession of deaths, happens in a family, the first thing that is done is to consult the astrologer, who is sure that a ghost is working it under the influence of magic. His prescription is, of course, counter-magic, to be performed by himself. An offence to a god can easily be rectified if one does some elementary sacrifices, but the performance of counter-magic is neither so inexpensive nor so easy. First of all one has to get rid of the evil already done. For that elaborate ceremonies may be necessary. Secondly, ceremonies to keep one immune from future attacks are essential. If it is any woman who is possessed of the devil, and it is women who generally suffer from these things, an expensive and elaborate devil dance called *Kolam Thullal* has to be performed. For this the village has to be informed, and each family in the village is supposed to contribute something in kind to the expenses and take its share in the work. The ceremony is as follows:—

Preparations for the dance must begin a good many days beforehand. The *Kāniyān* of the village with twelve others of his people come to the house where the

[1] *Cults*, p. 37.

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ceremony is to be performed and each of them puts on a mask made for the occasion and paints himself in such a way as to look really terrible. The mask of each has a different expression. At about 8 o'clock in the night, the girl (or girls) possessed of the devil is brought in front of the house where are gathered all the people of the village. The whole place is illuminated with big lamps and the girl sits alone, sometimes supported by her mother. Then one by one the masked magicians come before her and execute most frightening dances to the accompaniment of terrifying music. In dancing they make various gestures, possibly with a view to mesmeric effect, and throw various sorts of power, and *rudhilam*, prepared to look very much like blood, is brought into great prominence. Dancer succeeds dancer, each more terrible looking than his predecessor, and the poor girl loses control of herself and falls into a sort of hysteria, in which the devil in her confesses where it came from and who prompted it,[1] etc. In that case the dance is supposed to have been successful and the devil is supposed to have been cast out.

This *Kolam Thullal* is performed on various occasions. The only time I have witnessed it was in 1913, when passing through a village situated in the very heart of the country. The "subject," on that occasion, was a child-mother of fourteen, and the reason for the performance given by her brother, when asked by me, was that the girl had fainted four or five times during the month "without any cause," that they had found out through the astrologer that her husband's relations had been trying to cause trouble by evil magic.

A milder and less expensive form of the same dance is *Velan Thullal*. In this only one man dances with almost the same paraphernalia as the *Kāniyāns* have for *Kolam Thullal*. This variety, however, is generally used only to cure children.

Such performances are only for the ghosts of dead men who have entered into girls or children. But if *Kutti Chattan* tries to do harm, these practices are of no avail. *Kutti Chattan* (sometimes merely *Chattan*, *Kutti* means boy, a term of endearment, *Chattan* is supposed to be a corrupted form of Satan) is in no sense a god. He is something like Puck, very much inclined to mischief. He is supposed to be a dwarf, though he can assume any other form or remain invisible as he chooses. He never goes out of his way to harm anyone, though if anybody injures him once, *Kutti Chattan* never forgives and keeps on troubling him for life. His favourite method of annoying anybody is by throwing stones at the house or dropping unclean things in the food. He may do so without interruption, which would render life almost impossible. He is supposed to have no fingers and, therefore, his vices can be thwarted by people who know it. For example, he cannot pick up things if kept in a place

[1] Note; the "confessions" are without doubt due to subconscious suggestion. The whole scheme of the dance—the music, the masks, the lighting—seems to be arranged with the sole purpose of rendering the "subject" liable to suggestion. More than this, the girl herself believes that she must be possessed of some ghost, and therefore the ground for suggestion is already prepared.

776 high above his reach unless, of course, there is something near by on which he could climb. He cannot untie a knot, as he does not possess fingers, though he can open the strongest lock. What rich people do to keep their money out of his reach is to tie a knot on the purse and keep it locked in a safe, the latter precaution being necessary against human hands that possess fingers.

776 791 773 *Kutti Chattan* can, of course, be tamed by magicians and bribed to do whatever his patrons like. There is a story that a Brahmin landlord who was also a magician tamed a *Kutti Chattan* and used him for the purpose of keeping a watch on his things. A Christian tenant of his who had gone to pay the rent, not knowing the existence of the invisible and mysterious detective, stole certain things and took them home with him. But lo! *Kutti Chattan* had followed him, and the man was found dead next morning, and the stolen things were in their place. Such is the power of *Kutti Chattan*, the household elf of Malabar.

771 Whether the practices here narrated and the belief in the existence of a "naughty elf" amount to religion depends very much upon the definition we give to it. Though they are distinctly social and possess social sanction, I do not think it can be called religion, because there is a fundamental difference in the emotional and psychic aspects of religious experience and practice, and such social beliefs and customs as I have described here.

754 771 [178] [789] But side by side with this there also exists "black magic," sinister, selfish, and anti-social. It is fast disappearing, more as a result of economic pressure than because of any growing disbelief in it. A young man has no time now to devote himself entirely to sacrificing goats and birds all night and chanting formulæ so that he might become possessed of magical power. Those young men who have devoted themselves to such practices are, however, looked upon with great fear. The community does not like such practices, and though these magicians may excite fear, they are also aware of the general belief that they will some day come to a disastrous end.

Their practices are carried on in secret and nobody knows what they do except those initiated. Their assistance is procured only by people who want to do harm to others or satisfy ignoble desires. A man often gets the help of a magician of this sort to perform his "art" so that an enemy of his who is gone on a pilgrimage may not return. They are avoided by all decent people, and society in general, though it fears their "art," considers them charlatans.

754 There are many minor superstitions that can be only briefly noticed here.

784 123 [755] *The Evil Eye.*—The magical effect of the evil eye is a matter of very serious concern among Nāyar women. I remember being taken to task for telling a woman how healthy her boy looked, and must add that I felt as if I had been convicted of a heinous crime when four or five days later I was told that the child was ill. The entire feminine opinion of the village was convinced that the child was suffering from my evil eye, and a good many *mantrams*, or magical formulæ, were said over it before the child was well again.

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the child was well again. With this idea of evil eye is bound up what is known as *Kari-Nakku*, or black-tongue. When a man with *Kari-Nakku* utters anything it has effect at once. When the evil eye and *Kari-Nakku* are combined, then it has "much *orenda*" as an Angotkin would say. If your newly built house is looked upon with an evil eye and some good expression used by such a man about it, a lightning might set fire to it and destroy it the same night. If your mango tree is full of fruit this year and a man with an evil eye and *Kari-Nakku* looks at it and says "how fortunate," it might happen that for years to come it would bear no more fruit. If an envious woman, aroused by the green-eyed monster of jealousy, remarks how pretty a girl is, her hair might begin to fall off, her colour might fade, her cheeks might lose their bloom.

The fact to notice with regard to this is that you have to say complimentary things to effect evil. If you said how ugly a pretty girl is it would not affect her. You must say, out of your heart, how beautiful she is and then it might have effect. Everything is supposed to depend on whether it is said with or without design. If anything is said with design there would be no effect. Only when such exclamation comes out of the heart has it the power to do evil.

Koti.—Another evil-working power is *Koti*. The word literally means desire, but as an evil force it works only when a hungry person sees a rich and healthy fellow eating a good meal. If a poor man sees you eat, and his mouth waters at the delicacies before you, you are sure to suffer from his *Koti*, you will get stomach-ache and even dysentery. It is the particular look of the hungry man that has the evil effect. When once a man begins to suffer from another's *Koti* the only way to get over it is to eat some salt over which some *mantrams*, or magical formulæ, have been repeated.

The tabus which are prevalent among the Nāyars are too many to be described in detail here. A few examples will show how, even in the most important matters, life is regulated in primitive society. The reason for such prohibitions, as M. Reinach points out, is to live at peace with the spirits that are supposed to surround you.

You are prohibited from eating your food at dusk. It is supposed to be an awful sin, because everything is considered to be in "a state of suspended animation" in the very short period which marks the transition from a hot tropical day to a cool and breezy night. You cannot do anything at that time except bathe or pray. There are tabus on what you may do on particular days of the week:

> "*Ezuzcha Kulichalum*
> *Vyāzcha Kulikkarutu.*"

This is a typical example of the Nāyar tabu. Its meaning is this: "Even if you have an oilbath on the seven days of the week, don't do it on a Thursday." Though there is no reason assigned for such a prohibition, there is a sufficiency of

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rhyme, and I must say that I never knew anyone who took an oil bath on a Thursday, except people who take it every day.

The tabus extend to the way in which you sleep. You are not supposed to sleep with your body north to south or west to east. The reason, I believe, is that the spirits of the dead are supposed to live in the south and in the east, and if you lie with your head facing them you might become possessed of them.

There are certain days of the lunar month on which no one may start on a journey :

Yama Rudrāṅi Muppōram
Trikēṭṭa iva ēzhu Naal
Vitaṅkil vilēyā Bhūmi
Pōkunnaṅkil aṟuṁ varu.

On the seven days presided over by the seven stars thus enumerated, if a land is sowed no seed will sprout, if anyone starts on a journey he will not return.

I remember a curious story connected with this. Some four months before leaving for England I had to see the Inspector of Schools in Travancore to get my Leaving Certificate. The only day available for me was one of these tabu days, and in spite of the protests of everybody else in the house, I set out on my business. When I reached the capital of the state the Inspector of Schools had left on circuit an hour before to the place where I started from. I followed him there, but when I arrived he had left the place, and, as a result of continuous journeying and bad food, I was laid up in bed through a physical breakdown. It was true that if I had not started on that tabu day, but had had the patience to wait for another twenty-four hours the Inspector of Schools would have come to the town where I was living ; it was also true that I came back very ill. Everyone, therefore, took it for granted that all this ill-luck was due to my starting on a bad day. Many are the stories that are told of people suffering great misfortunes due to starting on these bad days, and there is, as M. Reinach would say, " a vast oral tradition of leading cases " connected with it. I daresay my case will go down as a most authentic one, as the facts are undoubtedly true ; only the explanation is doubtful.

Tabus like this can be mentioned without end ; but it is useless to do so, as they all seem to have the same " rationale " : that is, you will break your peace with the world of demons and ghosts that surround you and bring down upon yourself their wrath if you break any one of these rules. Tabu among the Nāyars is essentially an arrangement to keep the ghosts and spirits pacified : for it is clear to them from the tested experience of past ages that to break any of these rules is to challenge those who have power to do them great harm

In whatever is said here, it should be understood that I have tried to eliminate from the Nāyar beliefs those elements which are indubitably Hindu. As I have pointed out at the start, there are a good many devout Hindus among the Nāyars, but it is an interesting fact that the practices and beliefs above described are pre-

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valent among them also. The more one looks into these matters the more one becomes clear that in the unorganised and uneducated human mind, be it "civilised" or be it primitive, there is a horizontal stratification of the most contradictory ideas, which lie absolutely undisturbed in the ordinary course of life. In the mind of the ordinary man whose *forte* is not clear thinking, a great deal of intermingling of such ideas might take place. It is no uncommon sight to see a thoroughly Hindu-ised Nāyar who talks about Absolutism and Illusion, and believes in them, paying a *Kāniyān* to get the devil out of his little niece. This is, perhaps, the truth which lies midway between those who assert, like Dr. Frazer, that magic and religion are hostile and cannot be reconciled, and those who, like Dr. Marett, hold that in their origin they are the same, that it is in their character as looked upon by society they differ. The view I have maintained here is that religion and magic are different in their psychological and emotional effects and that Dr. Frazer is right when he says that they are at bottom hostile. But the almost universal coexistence of magic and religion is due to the attitude of society which tolerates all contradictions and insists only on their effect being for social welfare.

VII.—THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE NĀYARS.

Occupation.—The Nāyars are at present an essentially agricultural population. The vast majority of them are peasant proprietors owning small farms. Rice and coco-nuts are the chief things cultivated, though in North Malabar pepper and cardoman have also their share.

With regard to these matters the Nāyars have attained a certain stage of excellence. Their coco-nut estates are planted with a considerable amount of scientific skill and they are proficient in the industries which are allied to coco-nut cultivation; such as coir-matting, copra making and extraction of coco-nut oil. The extreme fertility of the land has made agricutural chemistry, as far as coco-nut and rice cultivation are concerned, a matter of secondary importance; and even to-day there are very few Nāyars who have studied the Western methods of agriculture.

As each Nāyar family generally lives in a compound of its own, coco-nut cultivation is generally in small farms. Extensive coco-nut plantations owned by the same man are very few. The position is much like that in England before the Enclosures. Even if all the land in a particular area is owned by the same person it is seldom enclosed and transformed into one large estate. On the other hand, they continue to be regarded as separate compounds and the houses on them are generally occupied either by Nāyar tenants or by Pulaya slaves.

The fact that Nāyar families live in garden houses is one of great significance. Horticulture is practised with great interest in all families, rich as well as poor. It is, in fact, very seldom that any Nāyar family uses vegetables bought from the market.

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241 market. All that is necessary is grown in the compound. The great difficulty of village life, effective sanitation, becomes an easy matter.

241 56 Rice cultivation is still based on serf-labour. The Pulayas were the slaves of Nāyars till nearly fifty years ago, when slavery was abolished. But the abolition of slavery has only changed the legal status of the Pulaya. He still remains a landless labourer effectively bound by his former chains, by the great social barrier of caste and the greater difficulty of poverty and ignorance. The Pulaya is an agricultural labourer and nothing else. As long as he remains attached to one family he receives certain sums of money in times of distress, pieces of cloth and food on auspicious occasions, extra payment at childbirth, etc. He loses all this for an insecure wage and a nominal freedom if he leaves his old master. The Pulayas, therefore, have mostly remained serfs in spite of the abolition of slavery.

241 In fertile districts the ordinary methods of cultivation are followed. In the less fertile parts the system of leaving the farms fallow in alternate years, or occasionally once in three years, is followed.

241 796 The harvest time is between April and May. Naturally the gayest part of the Nāyar year is in May and June. The great festivals of all the temples from one end of Malabar to another fall in this part of the year. The festival in a temple extends to ten days, but the last two days are the most important. Very seldom these festivals overlap, and therefore for two full months the Nāyars enjoy an almost uninterrupted carnival. In these places poets from the length and breadth of Malabar come to meet their confrères, artists to exhibit their work, musicians to display their art, astrologers to practise their tricks, in short anybody who has wares to exhibit or sell. No one below a Nāyar in the hierarchy of caste can go to these places. They are, of course, admitted and entertained free. In some places even the food is supplied by the temple. The greatest of all these festive occasions is the *Puram* at Trichur, in Cochin State, which falls at the end of April or the beginning of May. Then there is the *Aṭṭamay* at Vaikom a little earlier in the year.

463 [444] The Nāyars, as we noticed at the beginning, are mainly an agricultural people; but a good many of them also go into trade. There are in these days Nāyars very high in Indian commercial circles.

The educated people generally choose the learned professions. In medicine, in law, in journalism, and in public life, they have been very successful. Especially in journalism it is interesting to note that a fair percentage of the editorial staff of the papers in India, whether European or Indian, is drawn from them. The only Indian member of the Viceroy's Cabinet is a Nāyar gentleman, Sir C. Sankaran Nāyar.

434 *Distribution of Wealth, Poverty, etc.*—The distribution of wealth among the Nāyars does not show the same great inequality as among other communities of India. There are moderately rich families having an average income of £10,000 a year, but extreme poverty is unknown. This is mostly due to two reasons:

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This is mostly due to two reasons: 434 [487] [245]
First of all, there is the joint family system which provides for all the members without distinction. Secondly, every Nāyar family lives on its own plot of ground on which coco-nut palms are grown, which bring in a small but quite comfortable sum.

The standard of life is comparatively high. Among the richer classes it is 511
fairly decent, even according to the higher material standards of Europe, while, among the poorer clases, it never comes anywhere near the uncleanliness, the misery, the unrefined and uncultured barbarism which is the atmosphere of the slum life of the big cities of Europe. Poverty is less disreputable than in civilised communities, and the difference this makes is immense. The peculiarly civilised idea that success is the criterion of intrinsic merit, and that, consequently, failure by itself proves that it was deserved, is almost totally unheard of among the Nāyars. The fact that [613] [182]
the individual members of a family have to pool their abilities and, to some extent, their personal incomes, prevents the sharp distinction between the rich and the poor which is so characteristic of societies organised on an individual basis.

Food.—The Nāyars are not vegetarians. Like all Hindus, they do not eat 262
beef, but nothing else is prohibited. Fish is a favourite article of food, and there is an old couplet which sings:

[539]

"*Kaital vāzhakka Kari yumoru vaka*
Bhūmi Bhojana matu Koodillā."

"Then there is a kind of banana of the seas (fish)
And the Nāyars cannot live without it."

There is another couplet, which says:

"There is nothing among the various kinds of food which equals the flesh of a boar."

The Nāyars are great epicures and they cook beautifully. Rice, of course, is the staple food, but milk curds, butter and *ghee* are things of equal importance.

Most Nāyar families have three meals a day. The breakfast, among the poor 264
people, consists of rice boiled with water in the form of a pudding. With it is taken 262
as relishes pickles, fried fish, cooked vegetables, etc. The next meal is at noon. The main course, of course, is rice. The first part of it is eaten with butter, boiled peas, and many other relishes. The second course is fish, vegetables, etc., mixed with rice. The third part is eaten with buttermilk, mangoes, and pickles. The supper at night is also a meal of which rice is the chief part. The thing about it is that, though the main course is the same as porridge among the Scotch, the variety, as well as the taste, of the subsidiary dishes is what makes all the difference.

Clothing.—The typical Nāyar (male) clothing is the *Mundu*. This is generally 291
2½ yards long, 1¼ yards broad, cloth of fine texture made at Eraniyal, in South 184
Travancore. Nowadays, people wear cotton cloth from Lancashire, wide the [439]
richer classes go in for Benares silk.

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291 184 richer classes go in for Benares silk. This is wound round the loins and extends to the feet. The upper part of the body is seldom covered by the commoner folk, though most of them carry a second piece of cloth with them. Among the titled classes of the Nāyars it is customary to put on a long piece of laced muslin on the upper part of their body.

Mostly the Nāyars go barefoot, though expensive and elaborately-made sandals are used by the richer classes.

824 302 *Scents, Flowers, etc.*—The Nāyars use a lot of scented things. Sandal-wood paste, which has a beautiful aroma, is generally used on various parts of the body. Musk is also used, generally by ladies. Jasmine is the favourite flower. It is worn in clusters by women in their hair. It is very difficult to find an old Nāyar house which has not got a jasmine plant in its garden. Its scent is delightful, and when strung together as a garland it makes the most delightful, as well as the most welcome, present to a lady. Jasmine is also strewn in the bridal bed.

415 412 326 *Household Utensils.*—Household utensils, plates, pots, etc., are mostly made of bronze. Very few Nāyar families have got what is spoken of as household silver. The material they use is generally made with great taste, but the praise for this does not belong to them. The workers in bronze are hereditary craftsmen. Their life is devoted to designing and making these things, and naturally they have acquired great efficiency in it. The only praise that the Nāyars deserve for using them lies in the fact that, in spite of a strong temptation to go in for aluminium ware, which is much cheaper, they persist in using the costly, but better made and more artistic bronze things.

121 178 What is the future of this people? Will they become patrilineal and merge into the vast ocean of Hindu population, or will they remain matrilineal, while adjusting their social relationships and economic organisations to suit the changing conditions of life in India? Will they break up their *Tharawad* (the joint family) and abandon the primitive system of classificatory relationship? These are questions difficult to answer, but some new tendencies may here be noticed.

178 611 One thing I must say to start with. There is no chance of the system of matriliny undergoing any fundamental change in Malabar. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, the economic interest is too large to submit to any change in the order of things dictated by purely theoretical reasons. Even if we could establish that the patrilineal system of life is superior to the matrilineal, the change from the latter to the former would not take place in Malabar, because it would mean a social revolution of some magnitude. Secondly, as long as there is the Brahmin marriage system it is not only the Nāyars that are interested in its upkeep, but also the Nampudiris.

178 564 Another reason is this. There is in Malabar what may be called a strong caste war. There is first of all the Nampudiri class, mostly landlords with great social and religious influence. Their rivalry is not of great importance. There are, then, the Nāyars. Thirdly, we have the Syrian Christians, who are an extremely intelli-

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gent, persevering, and prosperous community. Fourthly, there are the foreign Brahmins, who are chiefly usurers, making money by lending at a fabulous high rate of interest and buying up property. Now, the *Tharawad* (or the joint undivided family) system gives the Nāyars a great advantage. Their capital is strategically massed, so to say, and while the property of a family is joined together its credit is much more than it would be if it were divided between the various members. Intelligent Nāyars see the advantage of this position, and are loth to break up what is most certainly an effective economic organisation.

The tendencies of change that are visible are mainly the following:

There is, first of all, a distinct process of change from the *matrilocal* to the *patrilocal* system. This is at present confined to a few of the English-educated families. The officials and those in learned professions have their wives and children staying with them, and this has most certainly set up a new current of opinion. The tendency among these people has been to change the matrilocal matriliny into patrilocal. The older families still look with disapproval on this, and it has not progressed very much, except among a few ultra-moderns. Even in orthodox families the women were allowed for a few months every year to go and stay with their husband's people. Now, by the Nāyar Regulation Act (1912) of Travancore, the husband is given the right to demand that his wife should come and stay with him. Of course, it is open to the *Karnavan* to prohibit this, but in such a case the husband can divorce his wife immediately. Therefore we may safely predict a definite change to a patrilocal system among the English-educated classes of Nāyars.

But whether this would contribute towards a change from matrilineal to patrilineal system is a question more difficult to answer. On the whole I am inclined to answer it in the negative. But for the economic competition of other communities, the Nāyars would certainly have partitioned their estates and started on a patrilineal existence. But now it is too late. The economic interest involved is so vast, the number of people to be affected by it so great, the change in itself so revolutionary, that it is, for a long time at least, beyond the scope of either legislative or administrative action. It would, indeed, be very interesting to watch the line of evolution which such a community, placed as it is between the close and powerful oligarchy of the Nampudiri Brahmins, and the no less powerful and at present unquestionably more aggressive Syrian Christians, would take. The next quarter of a century will probably solve the problem. What the solution will be it is impossible for us to say; that it will not for a long long time, at least, be real patriliny, I can prophesy; the rest time alone can answer.

APPENDIX.

Note No. 1.—*The Origin of the word "Nāyars."*

There are many reasons to believe that the term Nāyar is a corrupted form of the word *Nagar* or "serpent-men." The generally accepted derivation of the word

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is from the Sanskrit work *Nayaka*, meaning leader. As such a derivation flatters the national vanity of the community it has been accepted without question. The utter absurdity of the idea that the people who call themselves Aryans (as the Brahmins of Malabar still do) and look down upon the rest from a point of view of racial superiority, can have given them this proud title, never seems to have suggested itself. Moreover, the Aryan settlers of Malabar asserted a spiritual as well as temporal superiority over the Nāyars, which goes far to disprove the theory of the derivation of the word from *Nayaka*, or Lord.

It seems unquestionable, on the other hand, that the word *Nāyar* is the same as *Nagar*. As the totem names seem to have been imposed on the community from outside it seems reasonable to suppose that this serpent-worshipping people were called by their neighbours *Nagar* or serpent-men. That the Nāyars in ancient days were a totemic clan, is easy to see from the fact that every Nāyar family still holds the serpent sacred. Thus it will not cut down a *Kavu*, or serpent grove, as it is the place where the family serpents reside. It is, of course, natural that in a community of 3½ million souls the same solidarity of totemic feeling, as it exists, say, among the turtle clan, cannot have existed.

M. S. Reinach, in defining totemism as distinct from fetishism, says that the totem is a class of objects regarded by a tribe or clan as tutelary or protective in the widest sense of the word. Take the case of a clan with a serpent totem; the members will call themselves serpents, claim descent from a serpent, abstain from killing serpents, etc. Not only do the Nāyars still show traces of having done all this, but they continue to perform with undiminished zeal *Nagathān* (*thān* is an honorific suffix) *pattus*, or prayers and songs, to the sacred serpents. When anything goes wrong the astrologer generally finds something done to offend the sacred serpents. There is one singular case where a man, without heeding the warnings of all his people, went and cleared a serpent grove, and the result was that he died six days later. In popular opinion, this was without doubt due to the wrath of the serpents.

From all this it seems quite clear that before the Aryan invasion the Nāyars were a community with a *Naga* or serpent totem. This is supported by evidence from Ceylon also. Ceylon chronicles mention that when the Buddha visited the island for the second time (second century B.C.) he found the northern part peopled by Nagas who were fighting with the Yakshas, or the original inhabitants of the land.[1] This is without doubt an emigration of S. Indian people to Ceylon, probably as a result of Aryan pressure from the North. The descendants of these Nagas of Ceylon, it must be noticed, bear a close similarity to the Nāyars in matters of social life. Among their customs may be specially noticed: (*a*) the elasticity or rather the slenderness of the marriage tie which permits the discarding, without any disgrace attached to it, of undesirable husbands or wives; (*b*) the remarriage of such widows

[1] See Parker, *Ancient Ceylon*. London, 1909, p. 16.

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and wives with others as a universal national custom; (c) the absence of "*Sati*."[1]

In view of the fact that the Veddas are a strictly monogamous people, the prevalence of this custom in Ceylon can only be attributed to South Indian influence. Existing as it does in almost physical contiguity, it is indubitable that these customs and the Nāyar customs had the same origin. In fact, a Naga community was spread over the whole of South India, and the pressure of Aryan emigration seems gradually to have driven them behind the western Ghats in the case of the Nāyars and beyond the straits in the case of their kindred in Ceylon.

The Laws of Philology also support this view. I am assured by Don de Z. Wickerma Singhe that the change from "ɑ" to "ʏ" (as from Naɣar to Nayar) is very commonly met with in Dravidian and Prakistic languages. Apart from the general consonance of this change to the philological rules, Mr. Wickerma Singhe also pointed out to me that in Sinhalese[2] the Sanskrit word *Nāga* is written and pronounced as *Naya*.

The word *Nāyar*, therefore, is, without a shadow of doubt, the same as the word *Nāgar*, which means serpent-men.

Note 2.—The Nāyars and the Todas.

Dr. Rivers, in his learned and elaborate study of the social conditions of the Todas, makes some interesting comparisons with regard to their customs and some of the survivals in Nāyar social life. Before venturing to criticise some of his deductions I may be allowed to state that his idea of the emigration of the Todas to their present country from Malabar is probably right, though the evidence that he has adduced does not in any way prove it. The following facts which he has not noticed may give some additional weight to this hypothesis. Among the Nāyars the dairy (*Pal-pura*) is considered a thing to be kept *ceremonially pure*. No unclean person may approach it, and even the pollution of a child-birth is considered to be sufficiently strong to preclude those whom it affects from touching things belonging to the *Pal-pura*. It would be an exaggeration to say that the *Pal-pura* is considered sacred, but it is certainly *purer* than any other part of the house. Also the way in which the Todas convert milk into butter-milk is exactly the same as among the Nāyars. These customs with regard to the dairy are prevalent, not only where there is geographical contiguity between the Nāyar-land and the Toda-land, but also in Middle Travancore, which is at least two hundred and fifty miles from the land of the Todas.

Some, however, of the arguments brought forward by Dr. Rivers would not bear critical investigation. For example, he says[3]: "More important is the custom of

[1] *Ibid.*
[2] Cf. Wm. Greiger, *Sinhalese Etymology.*
[3] Pp. 609–70.

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114 giving a cloth as the essential marriage ceremony . . . Throughout the greater
585 part of the Malabar coast the essential feature of the marriage ceremony is that the man gives a piece of cloth to the woman. The ceremony of the *Sambandham* marriage (among the Nairs) consists in giving a cloth, and various names such as *Muntu Kodukkuka*, *Vastadanum poduvakota*, and *Putamuri* all mean cloth-giving."[1]

114 Now with regard to this "essential feature" of the Nāyar *Sambandham*, it may
585 be useful to remember that cloth-giving as a name for marriage did not exist in the
174 earlier half of the eighteenth century. The poet Kunchan Nampiyar, in his works
171 (thirty-two of which are directly or indirectly descriptive of Nāyar life) uses the word "cloth-giving" for *Sambandham* only once:

> "*Pennāṇu Puṭava Koṭuththennullathumunnikkittan Potti paranju*"
> "*Patrachaicism.*"

This "essential feature," therefore, is most certainly a development of the
[195] later half of the eighteenth century. It is, as a matter of fact, only within the last fifty years that cloth-giving as a synonym for marriage has come to be used widely, and even now it is used mostly by the ultra-refined, who consider it improper to utter the name of marriage in company. Therefore, to say that the Todas emigrated from the Malabar coast because of similarity in custom which, among the Nāyars at least, is a very late development, does not carry conviction.

114 Again, Dr. Rivers sees a "possible link" between Malabar and the Todas in
192 the word *Pul-palu*[2] of the Todas and the ceremony of *Puli Kudi* of the Nāyars.
171 Because of the similarity in these words, Dr. Rivers has suggested[3] "the name
174 *Pulipal* may mean tamarind dairy and be a survival of community between the Toda ceremony and that of Malabar." This is a supreme example of the danger of drawing conclusions from questionable etymological premises. Now *Puli* is a well-known Dravidian word which means both the tamarind tree and the sour taste. It is also used as a verb, in which case it means to make anything sour. Now *pul-pali* does not mean tamarind dairy, but the dairy of sour milk. How this could be a link "between Malabar and the Todas" it is utterly impossible for me to see.

114 Dr. Rivers has enumerated a number of points in which he sees "a close resemblance between the customs of the peoples of Malabar and the customs of the Todas." But I would submit that all his points in which any similarity could be seen are Dravidian customs belonging not only to the peoples of Malabar but to the rest of the non-Aryan peoples of South India. Therefore the arguments Dr. Rivers has brought forward prove only that the Todas are a Dravidian people. They do not prove that there was any connection, other than that of neighbours, between the Nāyars and the Todas.

[1] Except the last, which means cloth-cutting.
[2] Pp. 701–2.
[3] P. 702.

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Note 3.—*McLennan and the Nāyar Type of Polyandry.*

McLennan, in his well-known book, *Studies in Ancient History*, divides polyandry into two classes, and calls one the Nair type and the other the Tibetan type. "It is in the nature of the cases," says he, "that all the possible forms of polyandry must lie between the Nair and Tibetan forms." A good deal of what McLennan says about the Nāyar customs is vitiated by the unsatisfactory character of the information at his disposal. Buchanan, on whom he chiefly depends, made a journey through Malabar, and his account is wholly untrustworthy. The loose character of the sexual tie and the licentious habits of the richer Nampudiri landlords, as far as their immediate Nāyar tenants were concerned, were naturally enough interpreted as polyandry by foreign observers. As a matter of fact distinct polyandry of any type was very rare in Malabar except among the Kāniyāns (or the astrological caste) and among them it is of the Tibetan type.

If there existed any tendency towards polyandry among the Nāyars it was not certainly towards what McLennan calls the "Nair type." The wife of a brother is looked upon as a person to whom one could openly though not legitimately pay court; and any favour short of sexual relationship which she confers upon him is allowed by public opinion. A wife, for example, is the only woman who is allowed to smear oil on a man's back; and when a woman does it to a man it is considered to be a sort of semi-marital function. A man can always ask his brother's wife to do it for him, and it is done very often, even in the presence of the brother. Such customs are, however, open to two interpretations. As we have seen elsewhere, the *Machuna* marriage (or the marriage of cross-cousin) is the orthodox form of marriage among the Nāyars. To all the brothers alike the girl stands in the same relation before the marriage. *She could have been, in fact, the wife of any of them*, provided she was not older than her cousins. Even after her marriage with one of them this potential relationship continues to exist, and therefore all the brothers treat her "half as a sister and half as a wife."[1]

Or, it may be explained, that such relationship is a survival of a Tibetan type of polyandry among the Nāyars. It may be argued that these semi-marital functions which all the brothers can claim from each others' wives, prove the prevalence in a former time of a community of marriage relationship among the brothers. This does not seem to me to be true. Nāyar tradition gives no support to this view. We have no Nāyar stories that speak of one woman who was the common wife of her cross-cousins. In fact we have no tradition of any polyandry at all. Nevertheless, we find McLennan giving the Nair name to a particular type of polyandry supposed by him to be practised universally among them.

[1] It has been argued by Spencer and Gillen that the system of supplementary spouses affords definite evidence of a system of group marriage in a previous age. Their inferences on this subject have now been subjected to very damaging criticism, especially by Mr. N. W. Thomas, *Kinship and Marriage in Australia*, pp. 111–141.

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/Information on what the author calls the "Nayar family," consisting of all the descendants from the same ancestress, will be found in category 613./

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/Information on the Desa Vazhis, the "lord of the manor" and his role as military preceptor in the village community, will be found in category 631./

/The term "clan" has been used by at least two authors in this file, notably Fawcett and Thurston and Rangachari (who quote from Fawcett), to refer to subdivisions of the Nayar caste, which are actually subcastes and have accordingly been marked for category 564. These "clans" as listed by Fawcett (6: Fawcett, p. 187) are as follows:

Kiriyattil
Sûdra
Kurup
Nambiyâr
Urali
Nalliôden
Viyyûr
Akattu Châma
Purattu Châma
Vattakkâd
Vangiloth
Kitâvu
Pallichan
Muppathinâyiran
Vîyâpâri or Râvâri
Attikkurissi
Mânavallan
Vengôlan
Adungâdi
Adiôdi
Âmayengolam./